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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 000629

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP
CAIRO FOR STEVE BONDY
LONDON FOR ETHAN GOLDRICH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/03/2029

TAGS: PREL PHUM BA
SUBJECT: BAHRAINI REACTION TO TREATMENT OF IRAQI POWS AT
ABU-GHRAIB PRISON

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Robert S. Ford
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Embassy contacts expressed their anger and disgust about the media reports on the treatment of Iraqi POWs at Abu Ghraib Prison. After seeing these images on Al-Jazeera television, President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights Nabeel Rajab told PolOff on May 3 that the USG expects Arabs to cooperate when it is clear that the US has no respect for Arabs. Human Rights Activist Adel Al-Abassi told PolOff on May 3 that reports out of Iraq in addition to USG's support of Israel over Palestine is typical US behavior. Bahrain Women's Society member Soroor Qarooni told PolOff on May 3 that American soldiers and their generals need to be removed from the region and severely punished. "No human being deserves this type of humiliation," she said.

¶2. (C) Youth Forum member Jaafer Hamza told PolOff on April 30 that he could not put into words the shame and pity he felt, after seeing photos in the local newspaper. Another member Sami Maliki called PolOff on May 2 to vent his anger over a picture forwarded to him showing a smiling American soldier having two Iraqi youths display a sign that read, "Lance Corporal Boudreax killed my Dad, then he knocked up my sister." "You can't blame us for thinking that all Americans, even stupid soldiers, must hate Arabs," Maliki said. Law student Dua' Al Masae'd told PolOff on May 3 that it was disgusting to see the "enjoying smiles" of the American soldiers, who sexually posed the naked prisoners.

¶3. (U) The press reported on May 1 that pre-eminent Shi'a religious cleric Issa Qassim, during his Friday sermon, addressed the issue of Iraq and the policy of the American occupation. He said that Americans are materialistic and have lost all credibility since they came to loot Iraq and enslave its people. Qassim then warned the Americans of the gravity of entering Iraq's holy cities saying that the cities' shrines are not only for Iraqis, but for all Muslims.

¶4. (U) Writers and opinion leaders have questioned U.S. democratic and human rights values. Bahrainis are also comparing Arab satellite coverage of the POW issue with coverage on CNN and BBC World. One managing editor told the PAO that Arabs no longer trust CNN or BBC to report accurately on what is happening in the region - they only trust the Arab satellite channels. Many Bahrainis believe that the mistreatment of Iraqi POWs is much more widespread than has been reported in the U.S. media. They believe prisoners in Guantanamo and Afghanistan have also been subjected to torture.

¶5. (C) On the other hand, one of the most anti-American newspaper editors told Charge on May 3 that the one positive from this affair is that the US Army started the investigation. If the investigation is serious, the US will regain a fraction of its lost credibility.

¶6. (C) COMMENT. Most of the Embassy contacts who provided their opinions on the Iraqi POWs during the course of discussing regular Embassy business. Although the Bahrain population appears angry regarding the treatment of Iraqi POWs, we do not expect that its reaction will translate into any type of organized protest or specific threat nor does it appear to affect their relationships with Embassy personnel.
END COMMENT.

FORD